

ing of the Mils; formerly the falling leaves had
spread rich
vegetable soil over the mountain flanks, there
had been good
pasture for sheep where barren crags alone
were left, and
the climate, equalised by the moisture of the
woods, had
been less abrupt and violent in its changes.¹
Yet, in Zola's
youth, as now, "wherever there was the
smallest spring, the
smallest brook, the glowing land still burst into
powerful
vegetation, and a dense shade prevailed, with
paths lying
deep and delightfully cool between plane trees,
horse-chest-
nuts, and elms, all growing vigorously."²

Those various scenes were a delight to Zola
and his
friends. " They craved for the open air, the
broad sunlight,
the sequestered paths in the ravines. They
roamed the
hills, rested in green nooks, returned home at
night through
the thick dusk of the highways. In winter
they relished
the cold, the frosty, gaily echoing ground, the
pure sky,
and the sharp atmosphere. In summer they
always assem-
bled beside the river — the willow-fringed Arc
— for the
water then became their supreme passion, and
they spent
whole afternoons bathing, swimming, paddling,
and stretch-
ing themselves to dry on the fine sun-warmed
sand. In the
autumn they became sportsmen — inoffensive
ones, for there
is virtually no game, scarcely even a rabbit, in
the district,

and at the most one might bring down an
occasional petty-
chap, fig-pecker, or some other small bird. But
if, now and
again, they fired a shot, it was chiefly for the
pleasure of
making a noise, and their expeditions always
ended in the
shade of a tree, where they lay on their
backs, chatting
freely of their preferences." ³

¹ "The Athenaeum," No. 3686, June 18, 1898, p. 785.

² " Le Docteur Pascal."

³ Zola's " Documents Litte'raires," p. 88
(abbreviated).